

## Changes in Russia-US Relations Under Medvedev

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### **Abstract**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US and Russian Federation relations have been experienced ups and downs. The period of believing the end of long-lasting competition between the two countries after the cold war was too short enough to approve the optimistic analysis of Westerners politicians. The next developments showed quickly the distance between Moscow and Washington's views on issues of international peace and security. On the one hand, Russia's growing concerns about the former republics on its own periphery were intensified by the increasing effects of the Global War on Terrorism. On the other hand, the US growing presence in West Asia, Afghanistan and Iraq, and then Syrian crisis, Iranian nuclear program and deployment of the US Missile Defense System in Europe, prepared the ground for creating more confrontation between them. A decade after the independence of the former Soviet Republics, Russian president, Vladimir Putin, crafted and fixed a pragmatic foreign policy. Dmitry Medvedev, the next President of Russia, put this policy on the path of "reset", which is now facing with complicated problems. However, the question raised by this article is: "What internal, regional or international factors changed the Russian and US relations during Medvedev's presidency? This paper is based on a descriptive-analytic method, and to examine the mechanisms of this change from the Russian point of view, it studies the positions of its experts.

**Keywords:** Russia, the US, Europe, Medvedev, Obama, Putin, Bush, Near Abroad, Middle East, Missile Defense System, New START Treaty

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## **Causes of Changes in Russia-US Relations under Medvedev**

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### **Introduction**

The disappointment of the Russian pro-West leaders of the US aids in resolving their country's economic crisis and the transformation of political balance in Russia after independence, resulted in significant changes in its relations with the US. In the second half of the 1990's, Following the overall decline of the pro-West forces, the Eurasian Nationalistic approaches achieved more attention and significance. Russian government's attempts to keep its composing nations unified and preserve the country's ties with "Near Abroad" republics, which was accompanied by various Washington interventions, intensified the tensions in its bilateral relations with that. Slow paces of the economic reforms, the delay in the democratization of Russia according to its political culture, and centralism and authoritarianism in the country all intensified the pessimistic views of the west seriously.

During the first and the second rounds of Putin's presidency (2000-

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2008), pragmatism fixed in the foreign policy of Russia and during Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012), Russian and US leaders tried to rebuild mutual relations. In 2009, Following the proposal of US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, for "Reset" of relations, the two countries entered a new path. In this regard, the *Russian Newsweek* wrote that in February 2010, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafted and submitted a document to Medvedev for approval (Blank, 2010; 333). The document emphasized on the significance of the new movement in foreign policy on the basis of common economic and cultural interests with the US and the West. Valery Zubkov's Deputy Premier call for large-scale Russian-Canadian cooperation and Canadian investment in Russian technology, and Deputy Premier Sergei Ivanov's travel to the US also worth mentioning in this regard. The same changes happened for the relations of Russia with France and Germany as well. Of course, long before these developments, through facilitating the talks for joining the "World Trade Organization" (WTO), and civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with the US, Moscow had already benefited from the advantages of expanding ties with Washington (Blank, 2010; 334).

Russia's entry to the WTO, which made the US companies worry about its effects - due to higher Russian tariffs than their competitors from other countries - has been one of the main factors in changing the two countries' relations (Cohen and Riley, 2012). Just before official decleration of the "reset" policy in May 2009, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. proposed a "reset" with Russia (Terekhov, 2009, 1). Using this metaphor was a signal of readiness for change of relations between the two, and also a new start for regulating those ties (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2009; 1). Some experts considered this policy as a unique opportunity for Russia, and a "strategic window" for improvement and expansion of its relationship with the US (Karaganov, 2011: 8). Then, Russia increased pressure on Tehran and underscored his support of the US operations in Afghanistan. In return, US also tried to decrease the anti-Russian feelings in the former Soviet Republics, the pace of NATO's Eastward Expansion and the transfer of weapons to Georgia. (Karaganov, 2011, 8).

Regarding the "Reset", Alexei Fenenko in his article published in *International Affairs* magazine in Moscow, mentions three reasons:

1. Concerns of weakening arms control regime, because the "Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty" (START I) signed in 1991, has been expired in December 2007;

2. The fear of a military confrontation between them, especially apropos of the Russia-Georgia 5-day war in August 2008; the biggest challenge facing the two countries since 1983. There was a possibility of such conflict in Western and Central Europe as well;
3. Obama's demand for a remarkable reduction of Russian military arsenals.

In his speech on April 5, 2011 at the "Munich Security Conference", Hilary Clinton emphasized on the necessity for a 75% reduction of nuclear weapons, annihilation of tactical nuclear weapons and leading to real deterrence. Some of his points had formerly been mentioned in the Wyoming Agreement during the Soviet Union era in 1989 (Fenenko, 2011).

The US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, began discussions on resetting relations on March 6, 2009. In the next months, some steps were taken to implement their agreements. For example, at Russia-NATO Summit in Lisbon on November 2010, they agreed to cooperate on the so-called European Missile Defense System. But in winter 2010, NATO members rejected the Russian proposal for a new European security treaty. Finally, in January 2011, NATO Council reiterated that the Missile Defense will go forward with or without Russian cooperation (Fenenko, 2011).

However, despite disagreement on the aforementioned issues, during their meeting on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in Honolulu on November 2011, Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama agreed to resume their talks at the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012 (Yermolin and Yunanov, 2011; 24). There was a concern that in the event of any problem in these talks, the START treaties and also Prague agreement on European Missile Defense System could be in danger, too. Moreover, regional difficulties added to these strategic disagreements. The first, they could not reach to any agreement on the agenda for European security talks. Another important issue in this regard was the extending its scope to include the UK and France in arms control talks. The second was the issue of cooperation in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The third issue was that Washington and Moscow failed to establish an appropriate security system for cooperation in Asia-Pacific region.

Eventually, it made clear that "Reset" of relations during Obama's presidency is not an easy task. The developments in the two countries'

relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union properly indicated that even under the new conditions, some important factors block a comprehensive cooperation between them. After all, the present paper tries to answer this question from Russian experts' viewpoints that "What internal, regional or international factors changed the Russian and US relations during Medvedev's presidency?" It should be noted that although in the recent years some important factors, specially the Ukraine crisis have contributed to change in the US-Russia relations, since the focus of this article is on Medvedev's presidency, only the developments in the 2008-2012 period and the related developments in the immediate aftermath are discussed and analyzed.

### **Internal Factors**

Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 had accorded a special place to the Ministry of Defense. The importance of the research and educational institutions and the governmental and non-governmental organizations had been also emphasized. Additionally, the document stressed the need to be transparent in foreign policy, so that the direction of internal changes could reflect itself in foreign relations. This document approved for public release, because there were no secret issues. The idea of Network Diplomacy and the role of religion in Russian foreign policy were considered, too. Some international approaches like "growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with the economic and power domination of the United States" had been criticized in this document. From this perspective, "The world order of the 21st century must be based on the mechanisms of collective resolution of key problems" more than before. The US war in Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, and its unilateral action against Iraq in 2003 were also mentioned as examples of great costs for the people of the region.

During Medvedev's term, visible changes took place in Russia's foreign policy. At the beginning of his period, Russia had the presidency of "The Group of Eight" (G8), it had also joined with the "Council of Europe" and several other important international organizations. In recent years, the issues of foreign policy had also a special place in president's annual reports to the State Duma (Kramarenko, 2008; 28)

By and large, Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 was a reaction to the

internal and external changes of Russia and the whole world, which had made the change of foreign policy compulsory. After that, the terrorist attacks of 2001 made additional revisions. However, the document of 2000 had stressed on improvement of the hard international conditions and establishment of a multipolar system. It had also referred to the importance of cultural diversity and different approaches to the development. For some Russians, despite extensive international communications, focusing on cultural independence - like the era of Peter the Great in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries - could prepare the ground for having an independent role in the international arena (Kramarenko, 2008; 29). Based on the document authors' viewpoints, under the new international conditions that the US tries to establish 'Pax Americana' worldwide, Russia must also design and implement proper new approaches in accordance with its own interests. They believe that the US has shown no respect for other countries in creating a system for international peace and security. For them, the Western system has failed to solve the increasing global difficulties. Therefore, Washington's persistence on its ideological view has intensified these problems.

Maybe one of the influential factors on Russian foreign policy is an emerging class, which Mikhail Khodorkovsky named it "Pipeline Class" (Khodorkovsky, 2011; 4). This class is directly linked with the energy transit from Russia and the former republics of the Soviet Union. Another factor is the Russian monopoly on energy supplies that has deeply influenced its foreign policy. Russia's attempt to play as an energy superpower in the world politics is intertwined with the interests of some groups of politicians and energy sector (including oil and gas pipelines) executives. It's obvious that a more peaceful and less confrontational international arena could bolster the chances for Russia to more actively participate in the major international energy projects and better serve the benefits of these people. Thus, the new Russian Foreign Policy Concept has put aside the confrontational approach and follows the views of some of historical leaders; Figures like Tsarist Foreign Minister Alexander Gorchakov who announced the end of Russia's confrontational approach towards world In August, 1856 (Kramarenko, 2008; 29). Thus, in Russia's point of view, all countries around the world should have an equal say on their interests.

Six months after Putin's return to the Kremlin, a report published about his government achievements. According to this report, Russia's

foreign policy had been directed toward preparing the conditions for comprehensive development of the country, and reconstructing the economy fundamentally and making it competitive (Yeryomenko, Gabuyev and Chernenko, 2011, 8). Also, it was emphasized on the least capacity of military forces for defense, but allocating 20 billion Rubles for procurement of weapons and equipments was in conflict with such an approach.

This program was proposed by Medvedev, and Putin approved it. The authors of the report claimed that the ratification of the new START<sup>1</sup> is along the same lines of reducing military costs. The report also referred to the failed attempts in receiving security guarantees from the US about the deployment of the Missile Defense System. However, Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, warned in this regard and pointed to the clear violation of security guarantees by Hitler's Germany in 1939 and its later invasion of Russia in 1941. To Trenin, these guarantees must be designed and preserved through political dialogues and behaviors (Yeryomenko, Gabuyev and Chernenko, 2011, 8). Of course, Wikileaks documents have also revealed that there have been no considerable achievements in this field.

As mentioned in that report, one of the gains in foreign policy was NATO's Purchasing of Russian Mi-17 Helicopters for Afghan Air Force. The contract also covers support, repair, spare parts and training. Cooperation on transferring necessary equipments for fighting with the Taliban and the Arctic Council's resolution for preventing US and Europe's influence in the region were mentioned as the other gains of Putin's government.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on the United Nations' global role in maintaining international peace and stability was another point mentioned in this report. The Russian government also considered the pipeline construction planning for transferring the country's gas to Europe as one of its successes.

At the beginning of his third presidential term, Putin refused to attend the G8 Summit at Camp David in May 2012, With this pretext that he was too busy finalizing cabinet appointments (Gabuyev, Solovyov,

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1. Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

2. The Arctic territories, believed to hold vast untapped oil and gas reserves, have been at the center of disputes between the United States, Russia, Canada, Norway, and Denmark.

Chernenko and Konstantinov, 2011, 1). With no respect for Obama's invitation to the summit, Putin visited China in his first trip since Kremlin comeback to show the continuation of his Policy of Eurasianism. Since the Yeltsin's visit to China in 1997, Russia has followed Primakov doctrine on foreign policy. Primakov had advised Russia to ally with China and India and to approach the Islamic countries. In other words, this doctrine was the clearest reflection of the Eurasianism principles in Russian post-Soviet foreign policy until then, which continued to influence the country's foreign policy throughout Putin's presidency.

### **Regional Factors**

The change of Russia's regional policies became more evident following the basic changes in its periphery region and the Middle East. The growth of political Islam and the difficulties of the transition period in these countries, forced the Russian leaders to think about tightening security ties with these regions.

#### **- Russia and the Peripheral Republics**

During the official visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Kyrgyzstan on September 2012, both sides agreed on the Russian use of Manas Air Base and building the Kambarata-1 hydropower plant. At a joint Press Conference with Putin, Almazbek Atambayev, president of Kyrgyzstan announced that the US will evict Manas Air Base by 2014, and Russia will be allowed to have a joint military base in Osh for 15 years starting from 2017 (Barbashin, 2012; 9). The lease for the Russian Kant Air Base was also extended for another 15 years. Indeed, This was a great success for Russia.

In this regard, Russia has enhanced its political influence through increasing economic relations with Central Asia. Russia's aid in reconstructing Bishkek Power Plant, not only helps this country achieve self-sufficiency in power sector, but also makes it possible to export the surplus. Beyond Central Asia, this plan enters Russia into the energy markets of Asia and especially India through Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to this plan, Russia can also participate in completing the hydropower plant of Rogun in Tajikistan. Therefore, it will take a great step toward consolidating its position in Central Asia.



Meanwhile, Russia extended its military presence in Tajikistan for 30 years. Thus, Central Asia's developments show Russian growing interest in strengthening its influence in the region. Along the same lines, It seems that a trilateral pact is forming among Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Since the US still needs Kyrgyz route to support the Afghan government, Particularly after withdrawal in 2014, Russia's presence in the region makes more difficulties for the US. At least, Russia's growing presence puts it in a better position for bargaining. Of course, this needs the cooperation of other regional countries. For example, Russian-Led "Eurasian Customs Union" (EUC) including Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Without Kyrgyzstan is nothing. However, apart from economic interests in Central Asia, fear of spreading political Islam is another reason for the Russian presence in the region.

Despite this situation, Russia and Uzbekistan relations are getting worse and Tashkent's Withdrawal from "Collective Security Treaty Organization" (CSTO) in June 2012 was a sign of it. Following the agreement between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, and also changing the Manas Air Base into a center just for transferring forces and equipments, the US, in contrast, tried to make an agreement with Uzbekistan. However, on August 30, 2012 and at the prodding of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's parliament endorsed a bill, banning the country's hosting of foreign military bases.

By the way, Russia pursues the following goals in Central Asia:

- Reducing the threat from the South;
- Increasing economic cooperation with the region, especially in the field of energy transfer;
- Strengthening the regional integration and the former ties as a priority;
- Protecting the cultural integrity, and supporting the Russians and their language in the former republics.

The Russia-Georgia War of 2008 severely strained the relations between Russia and US and changed the Washington's view of Moscow. With the unilateral recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russian Federation, Georgia lost 20% of its territory. The US in turn showed its opposition to Russia's pressure on Tbilisi by passing a resolution in the Senate, in which unanimously supported Georgia's territorial integrity and recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as regions "occupied by the Russian Federation" (Simonyan, 2011; 6)

Some experts claim that the Moscow's dissatisfaction of alternative routes Georgia opened for transporting energy through its territory was the main reason behind this war. But, Medvedev told Russian soldiers in Vladikavkaz that Moscow waged war in Georgia against the NATO enlargement (Dvali and Reutov, 2012; 2). To this end, Putin has built good relations with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili to reduce Tbilisi's cooperation with NATO. However, the breakaway of Abkhazia and Ossetia has threatened Georgia's territorial integrity and to Moscow, NATO membership of its former Soviet republics is "a red line".

### **- Russia and the Middle East**

In October 19, 2007 and just two days after Putin's official visit to Tehran for attending Caspian Sea Littoral States summit, Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, visited Moscow for a few hours, to express concern over Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran (Reutov and Asmolov, 2007, 9). For America and Israel, Putin's presence in Tehran on October 17, implied its support of Iran. Although Olmert's visit was arranged before Tehran's summit, Putin preferred the News was not published to prevent its impact on his visit. Zvi Magen, the former Israeli ambassador to Russia, said that this visit represents Russia's attempt to create a balance in its relations with Tehran and Tel Aviv. In Iran's talks with world powers, Russia showed its willingness to play the role of an important power on the regional and international developments. Iran's case provides an appropriate opportunity for the country to demonstrate its independence at the time of collaboration, as well.

However, in November 2009, Iranian officials waiting to receive S-300 missile system from Russia, encountered Moscow's refusal to deliver. Russia's avoidance in fulfilling its one-billion-dollar commitment was faced with Iranian strong objections. Russian authorities related their delay to technical problems again, but it was clear that it is due to political reasons (Solovyov, 2009, 4). Iran had the same experience on Bushehr Power Plant; Russians were deliberately delaying and politicizing the project under European and American pressure over and over again. Many Iranian officials also criticized their behavior. Russia's breaking promise of delivering Bushehr plant increased the discontent of those Iranian willing to develop the relations with that country (Terekhov, 2009,1).

However, Russia, China, India and some other countries, have always tried to resolve Iranian nuclear dossier through negotiations. In this context, Russian officials continue to reject the American claims that Iran's nuclear energy program has military purposes. Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the "Security Council of Russia", has repeatedly denied this claim (Koryashkin, 2012,6). Accordingly, they also have not accepted the Missile Defense System in Europe to defend against a likely missile attack by Iran. The Russians had many tactical turns on Iran's nuclear program, too. However, after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime and despite intense dissatisfaction with NATO's military operations, the Russians refused to deliver S-300 missiles in the light of cooperation with the US.

There has been also an enduring attempt by Russia to influence Arab-Israeli conflicts. The visit of President Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah leader, to Moscow can be analyzed in the context of Russia's efforts to make a compromise between Hamas and Fatah. Moscow hoped its traditional relations with the "Palestine Liberation Organization" (PLO) can help to achieve this goal. In fact, after the victory of the Islamists in the Palestinian elections in June 2006, when Hamas gained the control of Gaza and left the Fatah ruling in the West Bank, the US and Europe had also emphasized on the necessity of talk with them (Reutov, 2007, 6). Israel and West hoped to reach an agreement with the "moderate" Fatah against the growing influence of Hamas, a group which rejects Israel's right to exist. Rather, Moscow's aim is to integrate the Palestinian people and build an alliance between the two organizations.

Contrary to its flexibility toward the American and European policies on people uprisings in some Arab countries - known as Arab Spring - Russia has supported Bashar al-Assad in the bloody civil war in Syria. Russian officials believe that the US and NATO along with such Persian Gulf countries as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, help the Syrian opposition and provide them with military equipments. Russian politicians always look with concern at the role of the Qatari government in the Arab League's measures against Syria. For some of them, the state of Qatar also has been very active in strengthening the Islamists of Caucasus (Konstantinov, 2012, 7). Qatar had been very active in the events leading to the fall of Ghadafi.

Many Russians believe that the US and NATO want to play the same role in Syria that they did in Libya and want to overthrow

Assad's regime through military means (Koryshkin, 2012, 6). On the other hand, since the current al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has declared war against the Syrian government (Satanovsky, 2012), sending weapons and other military equipments to Syrian opposition is very difficult for the US and NATO. On Syria, They also believe that the US and NATO are going on the same path they did in Libya, in which the Russian views were neglected (Volkov and Samodin, 2011, 9). Indeed, Russia has played an important role in deterring the US and Europe from pursuing their policies against Assad. One reason for this, is the Russian concern over losing one of its arms customers. Russia sold Syria about \$4 billion in arms from 2007 to 2010 and exported around \$1 billion of them in 2011 (Vedomosto, 2012, 6). Tartus Syrian Naval Base on the Mediterranean coast of Syria - one of the largest naval facilities of the Soviet Union in the past - has a strategic importance for Russia. Maybe it's not very important politically, but is still a critical military facility.

The current leader of Russia is more compatible with the current political trends in Syria. With the all-out support of the Russian Leaders, until now, the Syrian authoritarian regime has opposed the demands for building a free political atmosphere. From the Russian leaders point of view, developments in Syria are analyzed according to the conspiracy theory rather than paying attention to the internal needs of this country. They assess the fight of Assad's oppositions just on the basis of the power equations in the region and the world, not internal conditions. In fact, the importance of Syria for Russia is much more than a buyer of arms; since the Soviet Union era, it has been a strategic ally against the US and Israel for that. Russia is very concerned with the fall of the Syrian regime, maybe the battle will move to the southern border of Iran (Vedomosti, 2012, 8). Fyodor Lukyanov, editor in chief of the journal *Russia in Global Affairs*, says Kremlin warns the White House and its Arab allies not to exclude Moscow and ignore its point of views in the region's policy. In the words of Georgy Mirsky, a senior fellow at the "Institute of World Economy and International Relations" (IMEMO) of Russian Academy of Sciences, Vladimir Putin wants the history always remember him as a figure who restored Russia's global power. The case of Libya and Gaddafi's murder - an ally of the Soviet Union during the Cold War - was an unforgettable contempt for Russia.

In Summer 2012, Putin proposed the possibility of deploying Russia's troops outside the border of CSTO members. Given a further deterioration of the regional situation in the Middle East, his main purpose has been the emphasis on the Russian capability to more intervention in the regional developments against the increasing intervention of the US, Europe and some other Arab countries in that region (Konovalov, 2012, 1). Nikolai Bordyuzha, the general secretary of CSTO, announced that the primary studies on this issue has been started (Current Digest, 2012, 15-16). Due to Syrian developments, Putin's visit to some European countries in June 2012 was not satisfying. In his meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Putin was greeted by protesters who held Syrian flags and their protest indicated the extreme dissatisfaction of his policies on Syria. In France, his visit with President Francois Hollande was described very cold and called "deaf conversation" (Latynina, 2012, 8). Effective support of Europe and the US from social movements in Arab countries, caused Moscow to become more active in supporting authoritarian states. Thus, the geopolitical confrontation between Moscow and Washington became more clear by these developments.

### **Internal Factors**

After two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has not yet achieved its acceptable political-economic cohesion. This country, with the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons and various natural resources, faces with significant divisions among its political elites about the power structure. While emphasizing on the territorial integrity as a security consideration, they don't have any consensus on Russia's international standing (Zelobin, 2012). Therefore, a stable political system has not yet established and the problems of Medvedev and Putin eras confirm this view as well.

In many cases, recent years' Developments show that the Russian elite perspectives are heavily affected by cross-sectional and ad hoc interests, rather than the long term macro ones. Some factors can be mentioned in this context: First, the prevailing view in Russia about the place of this country in the world that is more ideological than scientific and realistic. Second, the influences of different pressure groups, interest groups and ruling apparatuses are considerable. On

many occasions, their interests are substituted for the Russia's real interests. The views of Russian Defense Ministry have been effective on this issue, too. The adoption of strategic doctrines requires an open, competitive and transparent condition which does not exist in Russia and the role of Individuals, not institutions, is undeniable in this case. Although there are so many well-known scholars and researchers in Russia, decision makers typically do not pay attention to their views and advices. This is the same common problem in all less developed countries in the world; the countries that Russia is the most developed among them. In fact, Researchers have not the opportunity to associate and collaborate with the foreign policy decision makers.

At the end of the bipolar system and the Cold War era, the leaders of the Russian Federation, such as Boris Yeltsin and his pro-West colleagues emphasized on the importance of the formation of a multi-polar world. But many, like Nikolai Patrushev, Russian Security Council Secretary, don't acknowledge Europe as a pole that is able to shape a multi-polar world (Koryashkin, 2012, 6). For some Russians, Europe is neither an ally, nor an effective partner (Ivanov, 2012, 47). They don't see any technological advantages in relations with that. Of course, many see the Russia itself as an important part of the European civilization that extends from the Ural (region) to the Pacific Coast, Far East and Central Asia (Gromyko, 2012). Given its geographical position, Russia is a powerful center for Asian countries affecting on their internal developments. So, Moscow has found itself in a place in which it should play an important role in international affairs.

Russian leaders have always insisted on the peaceful solutions to international problems. This approach has been very important on the issue of North Korea and Iran. Putin also has introduced a cooperative and not confrontational approach in his foreign policy - an approach that is seeking to strengthen the global integration. Moreover, he has emphasized the importance of economic issues in the same area. His emphasis on the necessity of state support to the merchants, reflects Putin's seriousness about this issue. In his view, the policy of deepening and expanding integration of the CIS members, should be the focal point of the Russian foreign policy. Accordingly, reinforcing the "Eurasian Economic Union" (EEU) is taken into consideration (Putin, 2012, 4). This is while, the US and Europe have adopted various policies to increase their influence and secure their interests that conflict with Russia's ones.

## Security and Arms Control

In 2010, NATO proposed a joint missile defense shield with Russia stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Indeed, Some Russian Generals believed that constructing an efficient missile defense system is not possible without actual participation of their country (Sharavin, 2010, 12). So, they thought that S-300 and S-400 “surface-to-air missile” (SAM) systems could play a decisive role in this regard. Russia's 2010 military doctrine gives air and space services a more prominent place (Arbatov, 2011, 3). In fact, Russian efforts to build a missile defense system of its own, indicates the value of these forces in Russian military in providing the country's security. For Russians, its missile defense shield is designed solely for defense purposes against airborne threats. Of course, it is well known that the US is the only country widely seen as a possible threat to Russia. Thus, Moscow cannot have two missile systems simultaneously; one against the Washington and the other to share with it. Prominent Russian political scientist Georgy Arbatov and a member of the “Russian Academy of Sciences”, however, believes that the two countries could cooperate in a joint system to a limited extent (Arbatov, 2011, 3).

US officials at different levels have repeatedly stated their commitment to the continuation of the Missile Defense System program. Instead, Russia is pessimistic that the US intends to protect its forces and NATO allies from Iranian short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. From the Russian point of view, since the US always underlines that It will not let Iran go nuclear, then they should not have any concern about their safety. What's the reason behind this? Russia sees no threat form Iran’s and North Korea’s ballistic missiles. Russian military experts point to the US technical and technological problems in its missile defense shield and say that Americans definitely will pursue their goals when they fixed the problems.

The progress in US-Russia relations in 2010, has led some observers to characterize this year as a good one for them. In April 2010, they signed the “Strategic Offensive Weapons Reduction Treaty” (SORT). Additionally, the US-Russian agreement on peaceful

nuclear cooperation, known as the “123 agreement”<sup>1</sup>, entered into force (Fenenko, 2011). It should be noted that the cooperation between the two countries in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy which began under Putin and Bush in 2008, suspended after the Russia-Georgia War. Russia's Admission to WTO and “Jackson-Vanik Amendment” repeal were also signs of a new “Reset” in US-Russia Relations.<sup>2</sup> Moscow has been seeking WTO membership since 1993.

For many analysts, China and not the US is the main rival of Russia and ratification of the New START Treaty was the most important gain in resetting relations (Rogov, 2012, 1). This treaty was signed on 8 April 2010 in Prague and after its ratification by both sides entered into force on 5 February 2011. But yet, the leaders of both countries face with a lot of obstacles. In the process of New Start ratification, the US Congress provided that the talks on Intermediate-Range and Short-Range Missiles should be continued (Kosachov, 2011, 6). Of course, Moscow and Washington failed to reach an agreement on the numbers of offensive and defensive strategic weapons, even though, reducing strategic weapons and military expenditures was very important for Russia. In this regard, Konstantin Kosachyov, the Chairman of the State Duma International Affairs Committee said that the ratification of this Treaty was an indication of cooperation between both sides. He also stressed on the confidence-building and measures like inspection as the necessary conditions for reaching the desired results.

Following the ratification of new START treaty, a group of Russian and American top military-political experts began the work on cooperation in missile systems, especially in Europe (Solovyov, 2011, 8). In addition to building a lasting base for cooperation between the two countries, they put two key issues on their agenda: nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament. Given their agreements on the new START treaty, Moscow and Washington must take concrete steps for reducing strategic weapons. For example, both

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1. Section 123 of the United States Atomic Energy Act of 1954, titled "Cooperation With Other Nations", establishes an agreement for cooperation as a prerequisite for nuclear deals between the US and any other nation. Such an agreement is called a “123 Agreement” and allows US companies to share nuclear technology and materials with foreign counterparts, carry out joint research and development activities, and bid jointly on civil nuclear projects.
  2. The Jackson-Vanik amendment was a 1974 provision in United States federal law, intended to affect US trade relations with countries with non-market economies (originally, countries of the Communist bloc) that restrict freedom of emigration and other human rights.



parties should reduce their number of nuclear warheads to 1550 units, as well as their delivery weapons to 800 units (Solovyov 2010, 1).

The main difficulty in their bilateral relations is deploying the Missile Defense System in Europe that both have different views on that. Its roots trace back to the decision of President Ronald Reagan and the Cold War era for exerting economic pressure on the Soviet Union. After the soviet fall, President Bill Clinton stopped this policy. Russian journalist Pavel Felgenhauer, known for his publications critical of Russia's political and military leadership, compares Medvedev's attempt for improving relations with the US to the same effort by Gorbachev in famous Reykjavik summit meeting of 1986 with Reagan. In his view, in contrast of Gorbachev, Medvedev failed to suspend missile deployment in Europe (Flengauer, 2011, 10). It is estimated that building this missile defense costs \$85 billion over ten years for the US. During the talks on missile defense, Medvedev announced a new round of arms race and Putin threatened to retaliate against an anti-missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic (Solovyov, 2010, 8). To Alexei Arbatov, senior Russian analyst, the goal of US in deploying this missile system is to undermine Russian strategic capabilities. Russian negotiators had the same concern, too (Yermolin and Yunanov, 2011, 24-26).

At the 47th Munich Security Conference in 2011, all saw an exchange of harsh rhetoric between both sides. On the one hand, Hillary Clinton said that Washington accepts no limit on missile defense and on the other hand, Sergei Ivanov emphasized on the necessity of reaching a deal on this issue between both parties (Fenenko, 2011, 9). Michael McFaul, the US Ambassador to Russia in a Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 12, 2011, favored the continuation of the Missile Defense System in Europe and then its remarks caused Russian objection (MacFaul, 2011, 7). Although, the new NATO strategic concept does not define Russia as an enemy, but Moscow announces this missile defense as a threat to itself. In reference to the mutual problems and the ratification of the new START treaty, Medvedev hoped that in 2010 with keeping promise to commitments in the framework of this treaty, there would be a different world. Otherwise, he warned that in the event of deploying missile system, they'll witness a new cold war era. Opposing this view, Yuri Solomonov, a top engineer at Moscow's

weapons design Institute of Thermotechnics sees no threat for Russia from the US Missile Defense (Felgengauer, 2011, 10). So, it could be said that at the time, there wasn't a unified position among the high ranking Russian officials against the Missile Defense System and this set of hopes and fears, led to the continuation of the talks on the subject. By the same token, Despite the announcement of Completing the first phase of the system by the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Chicago Summit on May 2012, talks continued between them.

The US and Russian Officials reiterated repeatedly that the Cold War is over and the two countries should try to eliminate its remnants and erase the past. This shows that there are many serious disagreements and many unresolved problems between them. In fact, the Soviet Fall didn't solve their technical and technological problems and their missiles are aimed at the other side's critical facilities. It reminds us that there is no difference between the worlds of 2000s and 1980s in terms of the numbers of lethal weapons. Of course, we are expected to see a major shift in that trend by 2020.

Mutual nuclear deterrence is the key concern of Moscow and Washington and despite the agreements, their nuclear weapons are still developing. Although Barack Obama proposed a minimum deterrence and a major reduction in nuclear weapons, Russian State Duma ratified New START Treaty with adding some provisions to the ratification in terms of bilateral relations. Since 1962, UK nuclear weapons were recognized as part of the US nuclear forces, but the 1987 "Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty" (INF Treaty) in Gorbachev era for the annihilation of short- and medium-range missiles didn't make any reference to them. Moreover, In November 2010, France and UK signed a treaty under which they will develop and test nuclear warheads together (Fenenko, 2011). Accordingly, the US can help them develop nuclear weapons without violating its obligations under the New START Treaty. Thus, such an act would disrupt the balance of nuclear forces in Europe; a situation that truly concerns the Russians.

Although new START Treaty has passed, but the question of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) remains a tough issue and at least for now, both sides have failed to reach a deal on nuclear non-proliferation. This different look is more evident in Russian nuclear

cooperation with Iran and North Korea. Also, Washington insists on reviewing NPT and Moscow continues to resist changes to the treaty. Instead, for fear of weakening their own place in the future European security system, the US and other NATO members refused Russian proposed plan in this regard. Nevertheless, Russia reacted to the US plan for the European security system with a positive look, but again raised such issues as the reduction of Tactical Nuclear Weapons, stationing European Missile Defense System, a review of the “Conventional Armed Forces in Europe” (CFE), the future of Intermediate-Range missiles and entering UK and France nuclear forces in disarmament and arms control talks with the US.

By the way, NATO enlargement to the East remains a major challenge in two countries’ relations. Russian representative to NATO Dmitry Rogozin has refused a Global political police role of NATO (Solovyov, 2010, 8). Russia expected NATO to be dissolved when the Soviet collapsed, but following waves of insecurity in Europe, this organization decided to expand toward Russia’s borders with changing its missions, approaches and functions. In the words of Russian Ambassador to Portugal Pavel Petrovsky, European security and defense policies prepared the ground for more non-military NATO activities. As a result of NATO talks in Lisbon on 20 November 2010, we saw major changes in its structure for facilitating not only its military roles but also its political-security responsibilities (Petrovsky and Dedushkin, 2011, 49- 57).

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen invited Medvedev to the summit meeting, although Russia accepted this with a delay to ensure that NATO is ready for resetting relations with Moscow. In essence, Moscow needed to ensure that NATO will pay attention to Russian geopolitical security imperatives and then participate in its summit. Thereafter, both sides announced their new strategic partnership in a joint statement. as the statement says: “...the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, and that the security of NATO and Russia is intertwined.” Of course, the existence of deep geopolitical differences made it difficult to achieve the stated goals.

The Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008, asserting authority over parts of its territory and threatening its territorial integrity were among important factors that impeded translating the agreement provisions into action. For Russians, US invasion of Iraq in

2003 and its huge bombing run counter with NATO Strategic Concept (Petrovsky and Dedushkin, 2011, 49- 57). However, they agree to cooperate in these areas: a joint ballistic missile threat assessment; pursuing missile defense cooperation; and a comprehensive joint analysis of the future framework for missile defense cooperation. Certainly, the necessity of cooperation in Afghanistan, have convinced the two sides to cope with many differences in their mutual relation. In Lisbon Summit, NATO leaders understood that without Russian cooperation, they will not be successful in solving the main international problems such as security in Western Asia and proliferation of weapons of mass destructions (WMD).

### **War against Terrorism**

Following September 11, 2001, the two countries could make great strides toward the fighting terrorism, especially in Afghanistan, and then the advantages of their cooperation became more apparent. Russia sees a serious terrorist threat from its southern borders, especially from Afghanistan and Pakistan, entering its Muslim territories (Lukin, 2011, 57). For many Russian analysts, the threat of these countries to Russia is very high and this is more evident after the Taliban's dominance of Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda's terrorist acts in September 2001. However, the fact that the Pashtun Taliban has no followers among the Tajiks and the Uzbeks in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is a positive point for these analysts. Accordingly, the Islamism expansion from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Central Asia will decrease, but as the events of 9/11 showed, the ability of Islamic radicalism for penetrating in this region is still very impressive. Aside from exporting Islamic fundamentalism, Afghanistan is the main center of opium production that a high volume of it (35%) smuggles into Russia (Lukin, 2011).

As the main supply route into Afghanistan, Pakistan's continuing insecurity has made the Russia's cooperation a necessity for the US and its allies. Thus, at NATO summit in Lisbon, members emphasized on transporting supplies and equipments required by "International Security Assistance Force" (ISAF) and Afghan army through Russia's route. The US always has asked Russia to facilitate the cooperation between ISAF and CSTO, because the latter has had many successful efforts in fight against drug trafficking in Central Asia and its surrounding areas. For

fighting more effectively against drug trafficking from Afghanistan, once again in October 2010, the US urged Russia to further cooperation with ISAF (Petrovsky and Dedushkin, 2011, 49 - 57). Since Russia is one of the main drug routes from Afghanistan to Europe, this cooperation is also very important to it. In their first-ever joint operation; Russia, ISAF and the Afghan army identified four drug laboratories and seized 932 kilograms of heroin.

Many experts believe that the Russian cooperation with ISAF is the result of resetting relations with the US. Under the auspices of “NATO-Russia Council” (NRC), This cooperation has also provided conditions for training to fight terrorism and drug trafficking. Moreover, it has had a dramatic reduction of the costs for both in pursuing their goals. Yet, NATO’s attack on Libya and Gaddafi's death, strained the relations between them. Indeed, Libya Invasion, Missile Defense System, INF Treaty, Syrian crisis and Iran's nuclear program have strained their ties.

### **Democratization Programs**

Some consider that public diplomacy is part of the state program, designed and implemented to inform and direct the public opinion in other countries. Thus, this type of policy is formed with the specific aims and plans. Some others have called it popular foreign affairs. Bearing in mind this issue, a significant number of Russian politicians believe that the US State Department seeks to plan and carry out various programs for weakening the Russian government and its legal institutions (Bovt, 2012, 63). To Russia’s conservatives, Washington seeks to interfere in Russia's internal and external affairs and in different ways supports its opposition. Stirring up “Color Revolutions” in the former Soviet republics has offered them good evidences in this regard.

However, Russian domestic institutions also have repeatedly criticized the limitations on the legal freedoms. Official reports have made references to the illegal interference of the state in the people’s freedom of choice and behavior, too (Moshkin, 2010, 3). Yet, we still see a continued forcible suppression of protests in Russia. In response to the death of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in Moscow jail, that Russian opposition believes he had died from being beaten and tortured by several officers of the Russian Ministry of Interior, the US Congress introduced a new law, entitled “Justice for Sergei Magnitsky

Act of 2010” that will make those implicated in the repressive arrest and death of Magnitsky ineligible for admission to the US and will revoke any existing US visas.<sup>1</sup> In retaliation, Moscow banned some of the former US Administration officials from entering the country due to human rights abuses at facilities including Guantanamo Bay. In fact, Russia did it to prevent further Washington’s sanctions against Russian officials.

### **Economic Relations**

Russian leaders know well that international politics and international economics are intertwined. Given the Soviet-era experience, they also know that rebuilding military power needs a powerful economic infrastructure and making up for their technological lag vis-a-vis the West needs to expand the relations with developed countries, especially the US (Karaganov, 2012, 12). For this reason, Kremlin is considering to join such trans-regional organizations as “Asia-Europe Meeting” (ASEM) which is constituted by ASEAN and European member countries (Koldunova, 2010, 27- 32). Strengthening of the so-called "BRICS" group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is another option for Moscow (Isachenko, 2012, 112, 121).

Despite the importance of political-security issues, the relation of two countries has not resulted in strong economic ties. The volume of US investments in Russia’s economy had been very low, half of which have been made in the energy sector. Thus, the US has been removed from the list of the top ten investors in Russia. The US total investment in Russia does not reach \$10 billion and only \$3 billion of that has been done directly. Trade relations between the two countries do not exceed \$10 billion, which is much less than US trade with China (Bovt, 2012, 63). Many US investors have demanded changes in the Russian economic environment. Regarding the financial corruption in Russia and Washington’s measures to restrict its impact on the relations between the two countries, US investors do not show any willingness to operate in Russian economy. The past has shown that expanding US relations with the authoritarian regimes, like Russia and China, depends heavily on the lucrative economic ties between the two countries.

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1. This bill was introduced on April 15, 2011, but was not enacted.

In October 2012, when it was announced that eight Russians and Americans have been arrested on charges of illegally exporting hi-tech components to Russian military forces and military-industrial complexes with a value of \$50 million, it was felt a heavy shadow of security considerations on their bilateral relations. Considering the modernization program of military systems in Russia, the importance of this issue has substantial sensitivity in Moscow and Washington. American conservatives judged this attitude as an act against the national interests of their country. Also, Moscow understood that it should focus more on internal capacity building (Felgengauer, 2012, 8).

### **Conclusion**

After Obama's election in 2008, his promise for a change in the US foreign policy reflected itself in relations with Russia and the “Reset” policy injected a new dynamism in their bilateral ties. Officials of both countries tried to consider the economic aspects in bilateral relations and take the advantages of their mutual capacities to meet their common demands. Their regional and international cooperation also increased, so that the two sides displayed a good collaboration on Iranian Nuclear program. Russia which was completing Bushehr power plant and was on the side of Iran, showed a behavior more consistent with the US, though didn't give up its concerns. On Syrian crisis, there are serious gaps in dealing with the Assad's government and its oppositions, but it did not destroy the possibility of cooperation in the areas of common interest.

In November 2011, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, announced that the US-Russia relations have been improved much more than anticipated (Flengauer, 2011, 3). On the one hand, he noted the American positive role in making peace and reconciliation in Georgia and on the other hand, stressed on the cooperation with Washington to help Moscow's entry into the WTO. He also said that the two countries' cooperation in the Obama - Medvedev era has been very effective and that they are considering bilateral visa facilitation. So their citizens will receive a three-year visa to visit the other country repeatedly.

Generally speaking, there could be three scenarios for the future of two countries' relationship. First, Obama's administration helps the growing improvement of all aspects of the two countries' ties. For many analysts, the possibility of this scenario is very low. In contrast, It's

very likely that in his second term, Obama rebuilds its soft approach toward Russia. In this case, the Cold War hostility would be put aside and the reconstruction of mutual trust between the two countries would be considered. Facilitating visa issuance between the two is the first step in this direction. Cooperation on defense projects, as well as developing NATO's relations with the CSTO, more cooperation in Afghanistan and continuing dialogue about INF Treaty are other options in this regard. Any progress in the above areas will pave the way for the increased cooperation in other fields. In the second scenario, continuation of "Reset" is the base; however, the Missile Defense System remains unresolved. Of course, their relations will have its stability, although other disagreements will continue. Political figures like US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, believe that the "reset" of relations will be continued. The third scenario believes in the fundamental failing of "reset policy". However, Obama reelection reduced the likelihood of this.

At the end of 2011, By pointing to the signing of the New START Treaty, continuing the non-nuclear cooperation between the two countries and US' consent to Russia's WTO membership, Sergei Lavrov called Hillary Clinton and himself as "pragmatists" (Gusman, 2011, 1). He also emphasized that the two countries' constructive cooperation on the areas of common interest and favoring a joint approach to settle international problems has important outcomes for both parties.

Finally, it should be said that with pondering the consequences of growing confrontation and its costs, the Moscow and Washington favored "Resetting" relations to meet their common interests. In addition, After the events in Afghanistan and Iraq on the one hand, and the revival of Russia's influence in the Near Abroad and the war in Georgia on the other hand, the ratification of New START is considered one of the most positive results of the "Reset policy" in US-Russia relations. Of course, It cannot be denied that there have been always various difficulties in their bilateral relations. Thus, the case of Sergei Magnitsky, arresting Russian spies in the US and the recent case of a US intelligence leaker, Edward Snowden, have shown that despite all difficulties, the leaders of both sides are confronting real challenges to improve and strengthen their bilateral ties.

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